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ABSTRACT

Teachers and administrators can help simplify the adjustment of student teachers to the classroom by being aware of student teacher concerns and problem areas. Asked to voice concerns and suggestions for future students, two groups of students at a Texas university and an Oklahoma university cited discipline, stress and fatigue, and relations with peers and supervisors as their three biggest problem areas. Other areas of lesser concern were lesson planning, professional growth, teaching methods, time management, local policies, and personal advice. A total of 27 specific suggestions offered by the surveyed groups is provided. (LP)

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# SUGGESTIONS FROM STUDENT TEACHERS

by

Sid T. Womack

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In 1977 I asked a group of student teachers to write some suggestions that would be helpful for other student teachers who would soon be ungoing the same experience. These student teachers at a Texas university gave 20 suggestions in writing. Categorizing these, I later found that they fell into these categories:

| | |
|---|---|
| Discipline | 8 |
| Stress and fatigue | 4 |
| Relationships with peers and supervisors | 2 |
| Lesson planning | 2 |
| Professional Growth | 1 |
| Teaching Methods | 1 |
| Local policies and procedures | 1 |
| Personal advice | 1 |

It would be safe to say that they gave the most advice in the areas where they felt weakest and felt that those following them would need the most help. The above profile is familiar to most of us who work with student teachers.

Five years later I posed the same problem to a group of student teachers in an Oklahoma University. They were more verbose and gave 44 suggestions. Look at the patterns involved, though:

| | |
|---|---|
| Discipline | 13 |
| Stress/fatigue | 5 |
| Relationships with peers and supervisors | 9 |
| Lesson Planning | 5 |
| Professional growth | 4 |
| Teaching methods | 2 |
| Time management | 2 |
| Local policies and procedures | 2 |
| Personal advice | 2 |

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I wouldn't claim that my sampling was the most scientific in the world, but the agreement in emphasis between the two groups is striking. Discipline has been and still is a topic of concern for neophytes in the profession. I believe that

time spent on discipline in methods classes is time well spent. Unless there is discipline, there can be no learning. The concerns of the second group over getting along with peers and supervisors is revealing. Perhaps more needs to be done with this so that student teachers do not feel so out of place in this new social setting.

The stress and fatigue associated with the experience may be part of the process of growing into a new profession. Many student teachers profit from hearing from first year teachers who have just finished student teaching. The advice they give may be the same as the advice from an older teacher, but identification with the younger teacher can help the student teacher comprehend the advice more fully. Student teachers sometimes feel overwhelmed by the work-load in lesson planning. As new teachers, each step of lesson planning looms as a separate obstacle, each decision one to be agonized over. As their experience level grows, they become more capable of combining steps in the planning process. Combining steps means that less time is spent in lesson planning.

Specifically, these are a few selected suggestions that they gave.

1. Be yourself. "Don't smile 'till January" is for the birds.
2. Let the kids know you are human! Don't be afraid to laugh at your own mistakes.
3. I believe always that students will want to come into your classroom if you have a SMILE on your face.
4. When planning lessons you will probably want to overplan at first. If you plan to discuss, write your questions down. Always have plenty to do in case your students finish early.
5. Treat your students as people, not objects.
6. Be consistent with your means of discipline. The students <u>do notice</u> if your aren't.
7. Use lots of repetition in your lessons.
8. If for some reason you are having a bad time--look at yourself first before criticizing.
9. Grow and learn from each experience.
10. Accept criticism and learn from it. (You'll feel better)
11. Cooperate with others in your school.
12. Be positive about discipline.
13. Be prepared to stand up for yourself. Do not let the students rule you.
14. Be prepared for things to move along at a fast pace and have enough plans made out to cover this.
15. Be as organized as you can be. This is the key to most of your work.
16. The student teacher should discuss with their cooperating teacher any weaknesses that they feel they have because she will probably be able to strengthen these areas.

17. The student teacher should have very friendly relationships with all the teachers.
18. If you don't drink coffee at recess breaks, find something to do or they'll find it for you.
19. Try to overcome exhaustion if at all possible. Get plenty of rest.
20. Please your (university) supervising teacher. Be excited about teaching.
21. A student teacher should know more about different ways to discipline children without being too severe.
22. A lot of theory a student is taught seems to get lost in actual teaching.
23. Remember that the students are people--they deserve your respect, and you should expect theirs.
24. Be prepared to spend most of your time at student teaching. No Social Life!!! Don't plan a wedding one week afterwards.
25. Have extra activities for the students to do. There will always be some students who finish early.
26. Set up rules on discipline and stick by them! (Ex. raising their hands instead of talking. Refuse to recognize them if they're talking.)
27. Get plenty of sleep! Your nerves will be shot if you don't.

Teachers and administrators in public schools where there are student teachers can help simplify the adjustment from student to teacher by being aware of the above and other problem areas. Sometimes they just need to talk with someone about the new sensations of being on the other side of the desk. It is important to our children that this transition be made as pleasantly as possible.